

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “Examining Initiatives to Advance Public Health”
May 17, 2017

At today’s hearing, we will have the opportunity to dig into an area where this committee has a rich history of bipartisanship over the years – initiatives to advance public health. There are four bills before us today, each of which serve an important purpose in this collective effort.

H.R. 931, the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act of 2017 requires the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop a voluntary registry of firefighter occupational information that can be linked to state cancer registries. Firefighters, in particular, often expose themselves to dangers that can impact their health well beyond their years of service.

In Oregon, we know well the bravery of the men and women who protect our communities during fire season each year. These firefighters are not only battling the intense smoke and flames, but are also frequently breathing in dangerous fumes and carcinogens on the job.

While we know there is a heightened risk of cancer among firefighters, there is very little accurate data available to understand the

full impact. I thank my colleague, Rep. Chris Collins for sponsoring this important legislation. This bill will help us better understand how pervasive cancer is in this vulnerable population, which will lead to better treatment and prevention efforts. I believe this is an important opportunity to make sure our nation's firefighters know we have their backs when they put themselves in harm's way.

Legislation offered by Rep. Robin Kelly, known as the Action for Dental Health Act of 2017, would help increase access to dental care in underserved communities by allowing the CDC to award grants for volunteer oral health projects and free dental services to underserved populations. The bill would also improve outreach, prevention, and education in oral health.

We'll also consider H.R. 1876, the Good Samaritan Health Professionals Act of 2017, authored by Chairman Marsha Blackburn, which would provide limited liability protections for health practitioners providing care to those in a natural disaster, terrorist attack or other emergency. Large-scale emergencies when rescue crews are overloaded treating victims require an all hands on deck effort. The willingness of qualified volunteers to offer their services to those in need should not be deterred by the fear of liability actions being brought against them.

Finally, we will examine H.R. 767, the SOAR to Health and Wellness Act of 2017, authored by Rep. Steve Cohen. This bill would expand and codify the Stop, Observe, Ask, and Respond (SOAR) program at HHS, which provides health professionals training on how to identify and treat human trafficking victims. Human trafficking is a crime and a violation of human rights. Health providers are uniquely positioned on the front lines to interact with suspected trafficking victims and get them help.

I'd like to thank our witnesses – experts and key stakeholders in these specific areas – for taking the time to weigh in on these important policies. We welcome your feedback.

I will now yield to ____.